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Water Safe To Fish, Swim

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Recent reports on television newscasts and in other newspapers have raised concerns about the level of E. coli bacteria in waterways in Mercer County and surrounding areas.

The fact that research has found elevated levels of E. coli in local lakes and streams is neither new, nor unique, said Lee Colten, a researcher working with the Kentucky Division of Water. Elevated levels of E. coli can be found all across the Commonwealth, he said.

E. coli bacteria is found naturally in the human body's digestive system and in fecal matter. It enters waterways through failing septic systems and leaking sewage pipes. Researchers use E. coli levels to determine the potential for pathogens in a body of water.

While persons who use recreational waterways need to be aware of the situation, unless there have been signs posted by the Cabinet for Health Services, they should not be afraid to continue their usual activities, said Colten. "I never said that [people shouldn't swim or fish in local streams and rivers,]" he added.

What Colten and other researchers are seeking to do is to raise awareness of the problem of water contamination so that action can be taken before the problem gets out of control and before it poses a catastrophic health risk. "People should take notice," he said. "We want the people in Frankfort to take the problem seriously."

Colten said he and the Kentucky Division of Water will continue to work with the Cabinet for Health Services to inform the public should there be an immediate health risk related to Kentucky's waterways.